

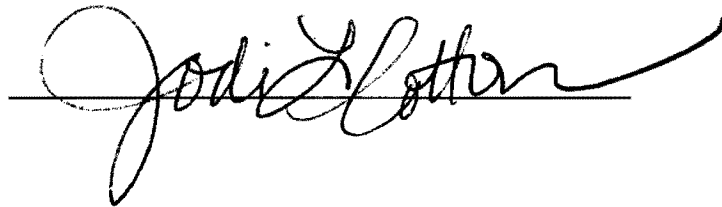
Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE

An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

by

Allison Saul

Thesis Advisor:
Jodi Cotton

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jodi Cotton", written over a horizontal line.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

Fall 2005

Decades of Musical Theatre: A History in REVUE

Abstract

Musical theatre has long been in existence, but like any art form, it has morphed and developed and changed since its beginnings. My thesis examines the specific changes musical theatre has specifically undergone in the last century. Beginning with a sample from the late 1800s, I work my way through the 1900s decade by decade, noting differences in content, vocal style, and overall look and sound while also highlighting historical differences and composers of each time period. This thesis will teach everyone something new, from musical theatre novices to seasoned veterans. Preparing for this recital not only showcases my vocal range and versatility, but makes it stronger. The recital's repertoire is unique but fitting and clearly showcases the differing and changing styles throughout the 1900s. The song list, program notes, show order, and a video of the performance are included in this thesis.

Acknowledgements

- I want to thank Jodi Cotton for advising me through this project and for vocally coaching me and accompanying the recital. She was also very helpful in choosing appropriate selections and cutting the selections to a shorter but still meaningful length.
- I also want to thank Pruis Hall for the use of their facility.
- Finally I want to thank Nick Caine for performing as my "male vocal partner" for the two duet pieces.

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Artist Statement

“Tonight I’ll take you through the styles and changes that musical theatre has undertaken from the late 1800s through the present, highlighting selections from some of the most popular musicals from each decade.”

And so began the performance that culminated many hours of work reviewing a plethora of musical scores, selecting appropriate pieces and cutting music, musical rehearsal, and research necessary to create the informative theatrical masterpiece *Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE*.

I am a Secondary Speech and Theatre Education major and Theatre minor, and my heart is always in performance. So, for my Honors Thesis, I decided to air on the side of performance, exploring the musical theatre side of my theatre education and theatre performance backgrounds. I always enjoy adding music to my vocal repertoire, so I decided that this thesis would be a great way not only to inform others about musical theatre and its roots, but increase my knowledge and abilities in my vocal work. I have worked hard in my years on vocal versatility and ability, so it only made sense for me to do a recital showcasing my ability to sing in many different styles. I was inspired by the idea of holding a “mini-concert” to showcase my hard work in singing in many vocal styles.

The first step of this thesis was selecting an advisor. I had taken private vocal lessons from Jodi Cotton for approximately a year, and had worked closely with her for three. I knew that she was the most qualified for this area of expertise, as she is not only an excellent vocal teacher and stellar piano player, but she was a professional at cutting

musical selections down to a reasonable length while still maintaining the integrity of the song. I knew once I decided on this thesis idea that Jodi Cotton was the perfect choice to advise a project like this. Once I selected a thesis topic and advisor, I was on my way to an excellent project.

The second step in the process involved a bit of research. I needed to read up on the styles of each decade of musical theatre to determine on what distinct differences to focus. I looked up several musicals from each decade, read up on their stylistic traits, and began comparing notes to determine exact differences in style and which musicals best showcased those styles.

Once my research was complete, I was well on my way. I began drawing from musicals I already knew and researching those I didn't, listening to many musical selections from each. I was able to narrow down the possible selections for the recital based on a few qualifications. First, a selection I chose had to be sung by a female or easily convertible into a female range. Secondly, the pieces I selected had to be solos or easily convertible into a solo – no big group production numbers. With these limitations, I was able to quickly narrow my choices. Sometimes I would choose the musical first and then a song from it, other times I knew that a specific song would work and I searched for it specifically. I finally narrowed the song list down to two or three selections from each decade. Jodi and I worked together to find music for all the selections, and we began the learning and rehearsal process.

One afternoon, Jodi played piano as I sang through all the numbers. If a song didn't work vocally or could not be cut easily, we crossed it off the list. If the song was too similar to another selection in the program, we decided on another one, striving for

some variety in the program. After much deliberation, we made final decisions on a song list. Our final program order was as follows:

1879 (1800s): Pirates of Pinzance (Poor Wand'ring One), **1900-1910:** The Merry Widow (Vilia), **1920:** Oh Kay! (Someone to Watch Over Me), **1930:** Porgy and Bess (Summertime), **1940:** Oklahoma! (Cain't Say No), **1950:** The Sound of Music (Lonely Goatherd), **1960:** West Side Story (I Feel Pretty), **1970:** Grease (There Are Worse Things I Could Do), **1980:** Phantom of the Opera (Phantom of the Opera), **1990:** Jekyll & Hyde (Bring on the Men), Wild Party (Maybe I Like It This Way), **2000:** Wicked (Defying Gravity), **Movie Musicals:** Moulin Rouge (Come What May)

We decided to combine the 1900s and 1910s because the musicals stayed fairly static in terms of stylistic development during that 20 year stint. Conversely, we also decided to include two selections for the 1990s. The 90s not only carried a great deal of different stylistic developments with several excellent examples, but we knew our audience would appreciate more pieces from that particular era. The specific rationale for my selections of each song is clearly stated in my program notes, but I will briefly overview the reasons for my selections.

First, *Pirates of Pinzance* was one of the very first shows considered “musical theatre,” and “Poor Wand'ring One” not only demonstrates the vocal style of that time, but was a female solo and one of the most well-known songs from that era. The turn of the century brought forth more of the same, but in more volume. “Vilia” was and is still a popular piece, showcasing more pretty soprano influences, though its home musical *The Merry Widow* is not very well-known. The Roaring 20s brought in a slightly jazzier style with the social acceptance of jazz and booze, though it still maintained its “sweet as sugar” sound. “Someone to Watch Over Me” originally comes from Gershwin's *Oh, Kay!* but is better known today for its place in the 1990s Gershwin revival *Crazy For You*. The Gershwins continued their success in the 1930s but changed their style slightly.

One of their most famous musical theatre operas, *Porgy and Bess*, was a financial failure in its time but became more popular over time. Its dark story didn't sit well with the public during the Depression. The popular piece "Summertime" is performed by a black slave woman in the production, adding richness to the jazzy sound that carried over from the 20s. In the post-Depression era of the 1940s, the population wanted a drastically different style, with lighthearted plots and characters with little depth. From there, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* was born, with its unforgettable romance and comedy. The style had quickly morphed into a much "showier" style, as demonstrated perfectly by the over-the-top character piece "(I'm Just a Girl Who) Cain't Say No." Rodgers and Hammerstein's success carried over into the 1950s with more of the same – musicals with lighthearted plots that could bring tears to the audience's eyes but always ended happily. *The Sound of Music* is still one of the most well-known musicals in history. I selected "Lonely Goatherd" because it showcases the uniqueness of the styles of these musicals and was one of the few selections not a group production number. The 60s took the musicals of the 50s a step further by adding more elaborate choreographed dance numbers. Even Maria's solo "I Feel Pretty" from *West Side Story* was heavily danceable for a solo, though still nothing to the elaborate dance chorus numbers choreographers like Jerome Robbins brought to that decade. The 1970s, then, added a touch of rock and roll. Many musicals of the 70s included guitar riffs and a harsher, poppier vocal style. The ever popular *Grease*, which is set in the 1950s but was written in the 1970s, adds this rock harshness in Rizzo. I performed her title song, "There Are Worse Things I Could Do." In the 1980s, Broadway musicals exploded in volume and popularity. Andrew Lloyd Webber explored older vocal styles and adapted them for a

current audience, as is evident in his production of *Phantom of the Opera*. I asked a friend to join me in singing the title track from this musical, a duet between the phantom and his object of desire, Christine, whose style explores the early soprano roots of musical theatre with a rock feel. The 1990s brought forth a very different sound even from the 80s, revisiting the rougher sounds of the 70s and taking it a step further and adding controversial or taboo subject matter to push the envelope. I chose two selections from this decade. Both selections deal with taboo issues; one is about prostitution and the other openly discusses spousal abuse. These musicals, *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Wild Party* showcase both styles of the decade, one dabbling in a belt mix sound and the other in true 90s “the higher to scream, the better” roughness. The turn of the century softened the rough edges of the 1990s and while belted high notes are still considered most impressive, belt-mixing is now widely accepted in musical theatre, with such Broadway stars as Idina Menzel and Kristin Chenoweth breaking ground. The hit musical *Wicked* recently moved to a tour, and I chose its most popular song, “Defying Gravity,” to demonstrate the “smoother but still impressive” sounds of the new millennium. Finally, I closed with a section about the rising popularity and return of movie musicals, like *Chicago*, *Rent*, and *Moulin Rouge*. I asked my friend to join me once again as I closed with the famous duet from *Moulin Rouge*, “Come What May.” For the thesis, Jodi and I decided early on that we would shorten the songs to make the recital length more reasonable. We decided that the audience would probably “get the point” after about a minute or two of the piece. In some cases, though, the song was either not long enough to worry about or didn’t work without a full performance, so in a few cases we left the songs intact.

The recital took place on January 24, 2005 in Pruis Hall, to an audience of approximately 20-30 people. Overall, the recital was a success. I executed the pieces well and the audience member seemed to enjoy it and learn something from it.

I'm not sure there is much else I would have done differently in executing this recital. In retrospect, I suppose I should have advertised more so that I could have drawn a larger crowd. One of the choices I made for this thesis was that I would read the program notes verbally rather than handing out papers to the audience as it is in formal classical recitals. Audience members received a program order only. I do not regret my decision to read the notes verbally, though I wonder if the audience would have learned more if they could read it for themselves. I would not have wanted to both read it and hand it out, as that would feel too much like teaching a lesson in school.

Overall, I was very pleased with the outcome of this program. I thought my musical selections were very original while still showcasing the stylistic differences among the decades, and I thought my program notes were informative but not overwhelming. If I had the opportunity to perform another recital, either of similar topic or from another angle, I would gladly take it.

“Thank you for attending *Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE*, and may you go home blaring your favorite show tunes!”

A video of the performance is included in this thesis for reference.

Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE

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1879 (1800s): Pirates of Pinzance (Poor Wand'ring One)

1900-1910: The Merry Widow (Vilia)

1920: Oh Kay! (Someone to Watch Over Me)

1930: Porgy and Bess (Summertime)

1940: Oklahoma! (Cain't Say No)

1950: The Sound of Music (Lonely Goatherd)

1960: West Side Story (I Feel Pretty)

1970: Grease (There Are Worse Things I Could Do)

1980: Phantom of the Opera (Phantom of the Opera)
Feat. Nick Caine

1990: Jekyll & Hyde (Bring on the Men)
Wild Party (Maybe I Like It This Way)

2000: Wicked (Defying Gravity)

Movie Musicals: Moulin Rouge (Come What May)
Feat. Nick Caine

Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE

MC Program Notes

Allison Saul

Hello, and welcome to Allison Saul's Honors Thesis Recital, *Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in REVUE*. Tonight I'll take you through the styles and changes that musical theatre has undertaken from the late 1800s to the present, highlighting some selections from some of the most popular musicals from each decade.

I'll begin tonight's performance with a selection from 1879's *Pirates of Pinzance*. This was one of the first shows considered "musical theatre," coming after the beginning of ballad operas and pantomimes from the 1700s. Though by today's standards, these pre-1900s shows were considered musical theatre, the shows went under such names as "burletta, extravaganza, spectacle, operetta, comic or light opera, pantomime or even parlor opera." Here is "Poor Wand'ring One" from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Pinzance*.

SING Poor Wand'Ring One

The turn of the century brought forth a stronger desire for this kind of musical theatre. Operettas such as *Babes in Toyland* and *Naughty Marietta* were becoming more popular. The sound of musical theatre was still very opera-influenced, as is evident in the next selection, "Vilia" from the well-known *The Merry Widow* of 1907.

SING Vilia

The Roaring 1920s brought more than just jazz and booze. This decade marks the introduction of big name composers such as Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, and George and Ira Gershwin. These names would continue to influence musical theatre throughout many more decades. One of the many Gershwin shows of the time was 1926's *Oh, Kay!*, including the well-known "Someone to Watch Over Me." The song is better known today from the 1992 Gershwin adaptation *Crazy for You*, adapted from the 1930 Gershwin hit, *Girl Crazy*. The sound of musical theatre in the 1920s varies from the original opera influences, with a slightly more sultry and jazzy feel, as demonstrated in "Someone to Watch Over Me" from *Oh, Kay!*

SING Someone to Watch Over Me

The Gershwins continued their success in the early 1930s with hits such as *Strike Up the Band*, *Girl Crazy*, and *Of Thee I Sing*. "After two quick failures, the Gershwins gave Broadway a jazz opera that stands in a class by itself. For 1935's *Porgy and Bess* the Gershwins teamed with playwright DuBose Heyward to adapt his play about poor blacks living in the tenements of Charleston's Catfish Row. With passion, infidelity, rape and heartbreak, it had all the makings of grand opera. Most Depression-era critics and theater goers were less than enthusiastic about seeing such a serious show, so the original production was a financial failure. But *Porgy and Bess* became more popular over time. In 1985, it became the first Broadway musical to enter the

repertory of The Metropolitan Opera Company. The sound of this 1930s show still holds strong opera roots but adds the popular jazz.

SING Summertime

In a post-Depression era with the world at war in the 1940s, the general population wanted more lighthearted topics and shows – the lighter in nature, the better. Thus, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* was born. With its romance and comedy, it strayed away from the traditional musical comedy or operetta, to introduce the first real “musical play.” The sound of the 1940s took a much more “over the top” approach, identifying less with its opera roots and more with unique vocal styles. The song “Cain’t Say No” from *Oklahoma!* demonstrates the beginnings of the unique Broadway style.

SING Cain’t Say No

In the 1950s, Rodgers and Hammerstein took over the musical theatre world as it blossomed into a large part of culture. With movie versions of their works *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *Carousel* grossing millions of dollars, each new production they produced was a very big deal. The 50s were home to well-known musicals such as *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Flower Drum Song*, and the unforgettable *Sound of Music* of 1959. The sound of musical theatre had developed by now into a lighter, sing-songy sound. *The Sound of Music* boasts well-known hits such as “Do Re Mi,” “Edelweiss,” “My Favorite Things,” and “Something Good.” I have chosen a lesser known song called “Lonely Goatherd” that demonstrates the change in sound for the 1950s musical theatre show.

SING Lonely Goatherd

1961's *West Side Story* filled out the movie musical era by adapting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and adding musical numbers and choreographed fight scenes. The introduction of movie musicals led the way for flashy special effects, elaborate dance numbers, and camera angles. This upbeat number demonstrates the ever-growing addition of pop culture to musical theatre. Here is “I Feel Pretty” from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*.

SING I Feel Pretty

The 1970s took the musicals of the 60s a step further by adding a touch of rock and roll. Popular musicals of the seventies, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Godspell*, *Hair*, and *The Wiz* were now considered “rock operas.” The seventies marked the introduction of such composers as Stephen Schwartz and Andrew Lloyd Webber, still two of the most famous musical composers today. *Grease*, though, became the longest running musical as of its introduction in 1972, thanks to its low budget. Though set in the 50s, *Grease* takes on the 70s approach of adding a rock and roll sound to a musical. “There Are Worse Things I Could Do” from *Grease* demonstrates the difference in the sound of musicals compared to before.

SING There Are Worse Things

The 1980s was the decade for revivals and Andrew Lloyd Webber. With *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Song and Dance*, and *Aspects of Love* under his belt, Webber ruled the Broadway stage during the 80s. *Cats* was named the longest running musical and still tours today. Recently, another popular musical from the 1980s *Phantom of the Opera* was made into a movie. The sound of musical theatre varied greatly from belty and emotional to operatic and beautiful. The title song, "Phantom of the Opera," shows off the combination of rock-style accompaniment and opera. Please also welcome Nick Caine, who will join me for this duet.

SING Phantom of the Opera

The 1990s brought forth a much rougher, raspier sound, a far cry from the pretty voices in musicals from earlier in the 1900s. In the 90s, the louder and higher a singer could scream, the better. Musicals such as Jonathan Larson's *Rent*, Andrew Lippa's *Wild Party*, Disney's *The Lion King* & *Aida*, and Wildhorn's *Jekyll and Hyde* focused on more taboo subjects like adultery, sexuality, and racial issues than ever before. Here I will present two selections in different singing styles from the 1990s, first "Bring on the Men" from *Jekyll and Hyde*, which blatantly discusses prostitution practices, followed by "Maybe I Like It This Way" from *Wild Party*, addressing spousal abuse.

SING Bring On the Men and Maybe I Like It This Way

The new millennium carries over some of the musicals of the 90s, but also introduces many more concept and artist-based musicals, like *Movin' Out*, which consists of several of Billy Joel's compositions, *Hairspray*, or *Avenue Q*, an adult version of Sesame Street that deals with adult issues but is performed with puppets. One of the most popular musicals of the new millennium is Stephen Schwartz's *Wicked*. The sound of musicals from the 2000s was still rougher than the original sounds up to the 1960s, and keeps the higher notes but with a "healthier" sound. Rich belt-mixing is now widely accepted. An example of that sound is easily illustrated through the show-stopper "Defying Gravity" from *Wicked*.

SING Defying Gravity

By this time, movie musicals have made a small comeback. With original scripts and pop music, *Moulin Rouge* was born, but movie versions of Broadway shows like *Chicago* and most recently, *Phantom of the Opera* have slowly become more popular. Thank you for attending this presentation of *Decades of Musical Theatre: A Century in Revue*, and may you drive home blaring your favorite show tunes! Please welcome Nick again as we close with "Come What May" from the popular movie-musical *Moulin Rouge*.

SING Come What May

Sources

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